

## **Conservation Area Deer Management and Regulations**

Deer management on Missouri's public areas has had a diverse history ranging from refuges that served as a source of deer during the state's deer herd restoration in 1940's-60's to the current offering of diverse hunting opportunities. Diverse hunting regulations on conservation areas have been established to fulfill the desires of hunters with different harvest and hunting methods interests.

In 2005, the Department applied six deer hunting regulations on conservation areas and monitored how they affected deer numbers and hunter attitudes. During 2005, 2006, 2011, and 2012 hunters on select conservation areas were randomly interviewed and received follow-up surveys to determine their perceptions of the deer population, hunting experiences, and overall satisfaction with different hunting regulations.

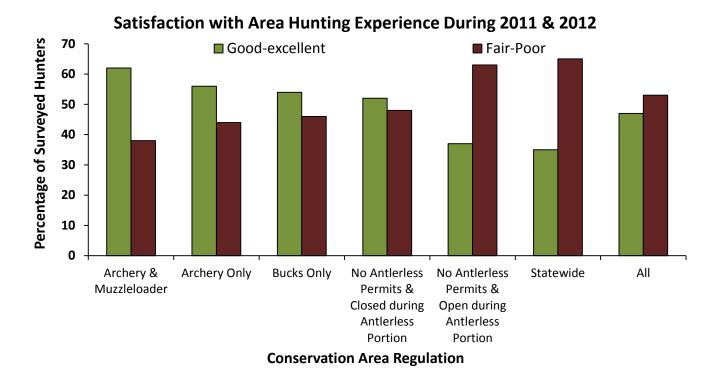


Figure 1. Hunter satisfaction with the hunting experience on conservation areas by regulation type. Conservation areas with restrictive regulations (archery/muzzleloader methods, bucks only, etc.) produced better hunting experiences for hunters than areas with more liberal regulations (statewide, open during antlerless portion).

The study found that for most hunters, the opportunity to see and harvest a deer is important, affecting how hunters select an area to hunt, and their satisfaction with the hunting experience. The results suggest that conservation areas with restrictive regulations increase opportunities to see deer and produce more satisfied hunters. However, for some hunters the opportunity to hunt deer and use whatever permits are available in the county is most important.

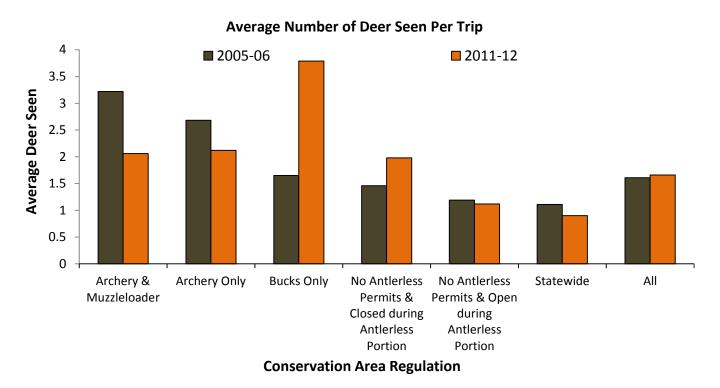


Figure 2. Average number of deer seen per trip by year (2005 & 2006 vs. 2011 & 2012) and by conservation area regulation. Generally, more deer were viewed on areas with more restrictive regulations. It is important to note the increase in deer viewed on "bucks only" areas between the two time frames is a reflection of growing deer populations as a result of regulations limiting antlerless harvest.

The Department is aware of hunter concerns with the harvest of too many antlerless deer on public lands (not just conservation areas) as indicated by the results of statewide surveys of a sample of all deer hunters. Generally, deer hunters on public land have lower success rates, perceive lower deer numbers, and tend to rate their hunting experiences lower than private land hunters. This at least partly explains why the portion of deer hunters who only hunt public land in Missouri has declined from 39% in 1971 to 11% in 2012. The Department continues to strive to manage deer numbers at desirable levels while providing diverse deer hunting opportunities for the public. The Department will evaluate regulation and permitting options to ensure levels of antlerless harvest on conservation areas produce biologically and socially balanced deer populations.

Please provide your thoughts and comments about deer management and hunting opportunities on conservation areas.